COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Project Summary
February 24, 2000

LOWER LOS ANGELES RIVER
WETLAND RESTORATION FEASIBILITY STUDIES

File No. 00-001
Project Manager: Sean Woods

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse funds to the City of Long Beach for preparation of feasibility studies for two potential wetland restoration sites along the lower Los Angeles River.

LOCATION: Adjacent to the eastern bank of the Los Angeles River in the City of Long Beach (Exhibits 1, 2, and 3)

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Resource Enhancement

ESTIMATED COST:

Coastal Conservancy (1996 Safe, Clean, Reliable Water Supply Fund*)	$300,000
City of Long Beach (Est. in-kind services)	30,000
Total:	$330,000

* 1997 appropriation to Conservancy for Los Angeles River parkway

PROJECT SUMMARY: The recommended authorization would enable the Conservancy to assist the City of Long Beach with feasibility studies intended to determine the potential for restoring two publicly-owned historic wetland areas along the east bank of the lower Los Angeles River, and for integrating compatible uses into the restoration. The potential restoration would replace river-associated wetlands that once bordered the Los Angeles River and other southern California streams in the vicinity of the coast, virtually all of which have been lost to urban development. The project is proposed in the context of widespread and growing public interest in bringing back fish and wildlife habitat in and around the Los Angeles River and in making the best use of the river as a recreation and open space amenity.

The feasibility studies that are the subject of this recommendation would refine a preliminary analysis by staff of the City, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works, and the Conservancy of wetland restoration opportunities adjacent to DeForest Park and to the 6th Street bridge. The feasibility analyses would also follow up on a recent City Water Department conceptual plan for wetland creation and water reuse. Studies of each of the sites would begin with identifying and examining any fatal flaws that could render restoration infeasible, and, barring such obstacles, follow up by determining such basic restoration factors as options for supplying suitable water, alternative types and configurations of wetland habitat, implementation costs, and a preliminary identification of potential environmental impacts. Approaches to integrating compatible purposes and uses such as groundwater recharge, trails, and an environmental education center would also be investigated.

Prior to the onset of agricultural and urban development, most of the streams that traverse the Los Angeles area floodplains as they approach the coast were braided, prone to realignment during floods, and bordered by and interspersed with thousands of acres of wetland habitat. At present, all of the previously meandering coastal plain streams have been confined to single channels and all but occasional patches of wetland habitat have been drained or built upon. The wildlife that depended upon those wetlands has been crowded onto the remnant patches, with resulting population losses and ecological disruption. Few sites suitable for wetland restoration remain.

Over the past 10 to 15 years, citizen activism and public agency focus have crystallized around the concept of taking advantage of the Los Angeles River and adjacent lands for fish and wildlife habitat restoration, public recreation, and trail linkage between the interior and the coast. Visions for the use of the river corridor range from installing pocket parks to removing the miles of concrete channel.

The proposed project falls within the range of river restoration concepts that seem likely to be realized in the next 50 years and is consistent with public agency plans. In particular, Los Angeles County has prepared a Los Angeles River Master Plan that calls for a river "greenway" incorporating parks, open space, and wildlife habitat such as Conservancy staff and the City propose to study on the subject properties. The City's General Plan designates these areas for recreation and open space. The project is also consistent with the findings of a Coastal Conservancy report on public access and habitat on the

river, prepared in the early 1990s at the direction of the Legislature.

The two sites that are the subject of this staff recommendation were specifically identified in the course of a Coastal Conservancy search for wetland restoration opportunities along the Los Angeles River and within its watershed.* (The sites and their restoration potential are described in the "Project Description" section of the accompanying staff recommendation.) Wetland restoration may be possible at additional sites along the river in the City of Long Beach and further upstream, but no other sites are known to have the combination of a cooperative public landowner and potential for extensive wetland habitat.

* A report on this search, "Wetlands of the Los Angeles River Watershed: Profiles and Restoration Opportunities," will be circulated at the Conservancy's February 24 meeting.